

BUREAU: National Park Service

ISSUE: Invasive Exotic Plants

BACKGROUND: Exotic plants are displacing native vegetation and destroying habitats needed for ecosystem health. In the Preserve, the melaleuca tree occupied more than 186 square miles of wetlands. The tree grows in dense monocultures completely replacing native vegetation. Melaleuca is spreading in south Florida at an alarming rate and has the potential to invade all of south Florida's wetlands within the next 50 years. The Addition Area acquisition creates an additional challenge to control a greater area of melaleuca trees and other invasive exotic species including java plum (*Syzygium cumini*), tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*), old world climbing fern (*Lygodum mirophyllum*), and the Brazilian pepper tree (*Schinus terebinthifolius*).

CURRENT STATUS: In the Preserve, an integrated pest management program has been in place since 1984 and has resulted in the treatment of over 14 million melaleuca "stems" at a cost near \$6 million. An off-site partnership mitigation project with Dade County has provided \$1.5 million of the cost for the treatment of 200,000 acres within the Preserve through calendar year 2001.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL: Ia1 Disturbed Lands and Exotic Species

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE: National Park Service (NPS) management policies mandate the control of exotic plants including total eradication if the exotic species threaten protection or interpretation of resources being preserved. Without adequate control invasive exotic species threaten the biological integrity of Big Cypress National Preserve and the greater south Florida ecosystem.

POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES: All south Florida governmental entities support and fund programs to remove invasive exotic plants. Exotic plant control also receives avid support from a host of local organizations including the Tropical Audubon Society, The Sierra Club of Miami, The Everglades Coordinating Council and Outward Bound.

ACTION NEEDED (IF ANY): ERADICATION AND CONTROL OF INVASIVE ALIEN PLANT SPECIES

DATE OF ACTION(S): ONGOING

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DATE: MARCH 20, 2001